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E.O. 12356: DECL: 11/17/88
TAGS: SHUM, PO
SUBJ: HUMAN RIGHTS CONFERENCE IN LOME
1.(C) SUMMARY: A HUMAN RIGHTS CONFERENCE ORGANIZED BY THE YOUNG AFRICAN LAWYERS ASSOCIATION (AJJAF) AND JOINTLY SPONSORED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF TOGO (GOT) AND UNESCO WAS HELD IN LOME OCTOBER 25-29. SESSIONS WERE DEVOTED TO THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND THE ACOI, CULTURAL RIGHTS OF MINORITIES, HUMAN RIGHTS IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND HUMAN RIGHTS AND AFRICAN TRADITION. THE AJJAF CONFERENCE RECEIVED HIGH LEVEL ATTENTION FROM THE GOT. LOCAL MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE CONFERENCE PROJECTED A GOT CONCERN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY [illegible] DATE 5/17/13
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DECLASSIFIED ☐ RELEASABLE ☐
RELEASE DENIED ☐
PA or FOI EXEMPTIONS

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DISCUSSIONS WERE
OPEN AND LIVELY ON THOSE TOPICS THAT AFRICANS FEEL THEY
HAVE A GOOD RECORD--I.E., TREATMENT OF THE ACOI.

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[illegible] INTRODUCTION.
2.(U) A HUMAN RIGHTS CONFERENCE ORGANIZED BY THE YOUNG AFRICAN LAWYERS ASSOCIATION AND JOINTLY SPONSORED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF TOGO AND UNESCO WAS HELD IN LOME OCTOBER 25-29. THE AJJAF IS BASED IN PARIS AND IS AN INDEPENDENT ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN LEGAL SCHOLARS WHO RESEARCH AFRICAN LAW AND LEGAL TRADITIONS. IT PREVIOUSLY HAS COLLABORATED WITH UNESCO ON HUMAN RIGHTS CONFERENCES HELD IN DAKAR IN JUNE AND DECEMBER OF 1981. [illegible] THE AJJAF AIMS TO CONTRIBUTE TO [illegible] PROBLEMS OCCURRING IN INCREASED AFRICAN [illegible]

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HUMAN RIGHTS.

3.(U) THE CONFERENCE OPENED WITH AN ADDRESS BY AYITI GACHIN MIVEDOR, DIRECTOR OF THE RASSEMBLEMENT DU PEUPLE TOGOLAIS (RPT), TOGO'S ONLY POLITICAL PARTY. HE HIGHLIGHTED THE IMPORTANCE OF PUTTING HUMAN RIGHTS DISCUSSIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF AFRICAN TRADITIONS, EMPHASIZING A PRIORITY TO MAINTAIN HARMONIOUS COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND SECURITY. MIVEDOR STATED THAT THE WESTERN CONCEPT OF INDIVIDUALISM, INTRODUCED AND IMPOSED DURING THE COLONIAL ERA, HAD FAILED TO REPLACE THE TRADITIONAL AFRICAN VALUES OF COMMUNITY, HARMONY AND SOLIDARITY. WITHIN THOSE TRADITIONS, MANY HUMAN RIGHTS HAD WIDE SCOPE.

4.(U) OTHER CONFERENCE PAPERS ELABORATED THIS THEME AND ADDRESSED AREAS IN WHICH THE AFRICA RECORD IN HUMAN RIGHTS IS PERCEIVED BY AFRICANS AS BEING STRONG, I.E., THE

COMMUNAL CONCERN FOR THE CARE OF THE AGED AND CHILDREN, AND RESPECT FOR THE ECONOMIC AND TRADITIONAL ROLE OF WOMEN

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IN AFRICAN SOCIETY. DEBATE WAS LIVELY, AND HELPED TO LEGITIMIZE TO A DEGREE DISCUSSION AND CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THESE KINDS OF HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES. DURING THE DEBATE ON WOMEN'S ISSUES, FOR EXAMPLE, THE DELEGATES DID NOT HESITATE TO CRITICIZE THE TREATMENT THAT WOMEN RECEIVE IN ISLAMIC STATES. AT THE SAME TIME THE POSITIVE SIDE OF AFRICAN PRACTICES IN THIS REGARD, PARTICULARLY THE TRADITIONAL ECONOMIC RIGHTS AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE MARKET PLACE AND ROLE AS PROTECTOR OF THE MORAL AND CULTURAL TRADITIONS, WERE HIGHLIGHTED. PARTICIPANTS ALSO TOUCHED ON THE MORE CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES OF JOB DISCRIMINATION IN THE CIVIL SERVICE AGAINST WOMEN AND THE TRADITIONALLY LOW POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE SOCIETY. DISCUSSIONS ON RIGHTS OF THE AGED POINTED TO THE TRADITIONALLY PRIVILEGED STATUS OF OLD PEOPLE IN AFRICAN SOCIETY BUT ALSO NOTED THAT OFTEN IT WAS OLDER VILLAGE LEADERS WHO BLOCKED REFORM PARTICULARLY IN THE AREA OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS. DISCUSSION OF POLITICAL GUARANTEES FOR INDIVIDUAL LIBERTIES OR POLITICAL RIGHTS WAS MORE CIRCUMSPECT AND QUICKLY BECAME MIRED IN A DIFFUSE EFFORT TO DEFINE POLITICAL RIGHTS IN THE AFRICAN TRADITION. DISCUSSION PARTICULARLY FOCUSED ON WHETHER GUARANTEEING POLITICAL RIGHTS, PARTICULARLY OF MINORITIES, IS CONSISTENT WITH THE PRIORITY OF BUILDING NATIONAL POLITICAL UNITY.

5.(U) THE LOME CONFERENCE DIFFERED FROM OTHER AFRICAN HUMAN RIGHTS CONFERENCES (FREETOWN 1978, DAKAR 1979) IN THAT IT DID NOT ADDRESS HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES SUCH AS THE RIGHT TO LEGAL DEFENSE. THERE WAS NO SPECIFIC MENTION OF A REQUIREMENT FOR AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS AND THE OAU TO PROMOTE AND PROTECT

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HUMAN RIGHTS. IT ABSTAINED FROM PAST CONCLAVES IN ITS TREATMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA.
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